

Dear Interested Party:

We know from the growing volume of calls that many of you are concerned about Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and how this new disease may impact Virginia visitors and citizens. At this time, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) do not recommend canceling or postponing classes, meetings or other gatherings that will include persons traveling to the United States from areas with SARS.

If your organization hosts travelers from around the world, you should be aware that anyone who is arriving in the United States from one of the SARS alert or advisory localities identified by the World Health Organization and the CDC will receive a health alert notice from CDC. This card warns travelers that they may have been exposed to SARS and that they should be monitoring their health for 10 days and if they become ill with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, they should consult a physician. The information provided in the alert notice can be accessed at the CDC's SARS Web site at [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/travel.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/travel.htm).

Information on areas that are considered high risk for SARS transmission and guidelines for travelers, family members, health care workers, families of international adoptees, cruise ship passengers and crew members, and airline, airport and air travel workers is constantly being updated so we recommend that persons who are concerned about traveling or having contact with travelers check the Web sites frequently (see link above).

Virginia physicians have been provided with information on SARS and know how to contact their local health departments to receive current information on managing persons who may have been exposed to SARS and what kind of laboratory samples to collect, if indicated. Local health departments have 24/7 access to someone in the Office of Epidemiology of the Virginia Department of Health who is knowledgeable about SARS and its containment. Staff in the Office of Epidemiology have access to experts at CDC.

It is important to understand that anyone known to the health department who may be infected with SARS and capable of transmitting it is isolated at home or in a health care facility to prevent spread of the infection. Fortunately, the primary way that SARS appears to spread is by close person-to-person contact. More information about how SARS is spread is available at [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/factsheet.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/factsheet.htm).

Knowing how the disease is most likely to be spread helps individuals know what steps to take to minimize the possibility of becoming infected with SARS (and many other communicable diseases). Frequent hand washing with soap and water is extremely important to wash away any virus particles that may have been picked up by touching people or objects that respiratory droplets have fallen on. If hands are not visibly soiled, alcohol-based hand rubs may be used as an alternative. Don't share eating and drinking utensils and if you have to be in a country that has a SARS advisory, avoid crowds as much as possible.

At this time, CDC does not recommend quarantine of persons arriving from areas with SARS. If organization representatives become aware of a person from an area with SARS who develops fever or respiratory symptoms, the following steps should be taken:

1. Exclude the ill person from activities (e.g., classes, meetings, and other public areas) and locate him/her in a separate area to minimize contact with other people while awaiting further medical evaluation.
2. Alert appropriate health-care personnel that an individual from an area with SARS requires evaluation, so that advance preparations can be made to implement infection control procedures to prevent transmission to others during transport and in the health-care setting.
3. Remind the treating health-care provider to notify the local health department if SARS is suspected.

Organizations that are hosting guests from countries affected by SARS may want to have a pre-established physician or medical facility to which suspects are sent for evaluation. Be sure to warn the facility when you are sending a patient to be evaluated so that arrangements can be made to prevent transmission when the person arrives. You can always consult with your local health department if you are not sure whether to send someone for medical care.

For additional information and guidance for institutions or organizations hosting persons arriving in the United States from areas with SARS go to <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/hostingarrivals.htm>.